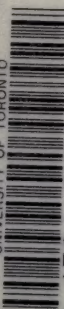


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III.

A



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

THE SECRET ROSE.

THE CELTIC TWILIGHT.

POEMS.

THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS

THE SHADOWY WATERS.

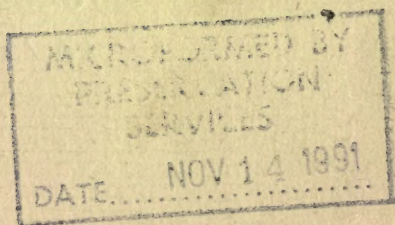
IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL.

PLAYS FOR AN IRISH THEATRE  
VOLUME III.





THE KING'S THRESHOLD: AND  
ON BAILE'S STRAND: BEING  
VOLUME THREE OF PLAYS  
FOR AN IRISH THEATRE: BY  
W. B. YEATS



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## NOTE

BOTH these plays have been written for Mr. Fay's "Irish National Theatre." "The King's Threshold" was played in October, 1903, and "On Baile's Strand" will be played in February or March, 1904. Both are founded on Old Irish Prose Romances, but I have borrowed some ideas for the arrangement of my subject in "The King's Threshold" from "Sancan the Bard," a play published by Mr. Edwin Ellis some ten years ago.

W. B. Y.

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# THE KING'S THRESHOLD

III.

B





## LIST OF CHARACTERS

KING GUAIRE.

THE CHAMBERLAIN OF KING GUAIRE. ✓

A Soldier.

A Monk.

THE MAYOR OF KINVARA. 1

A Cripple.

Another Cripple.

AILEEN, }  
ESSA, } Ladies of the Court.

PRINCESS BUAN.

PRINCESS FINNHUA, her Sister.

FEDELM, Seanchan's Sweetheart.

CIAN, }  
BRIAN, } Servants of Seanchan.

SENIAS, }  
ARIAS, } Pupils of Seanchan.

SEANCHAN (pronounced Shanahan), Chief Poet of Ireland.

Pupils, Courtiers.



## A PROLOGUE.<sup>1</sup>

*An Old Man with a red dressing-gown, red slippers and red nightcap, holding a brass candlestick with a guttering candle in it, comes on from side of stage and goes in front of the dull green curtain.*

*Old Man.* I've got to speak the prologue. [*He shuffles on a few steps.*] My nephew, who is one of the play actors, came to me, and I in my bed, and my prayers said, and the candle put out, and he told me there were so many characters in this new play, that all the company were in it, whether they had been long or short at the business,

<sup>1</sup> Written for the first production of "The King's Threshold" in Dublin, but not used, as, owing to the smallness of the company, nobody could be spared to speak it.



## A PROLOGUE

and that there wasn't one left to speak the prologue. Wait a bit, there's a draught here. [*He pulls the curtain closer together.*] That's better. And that's why I'm here, and maybe I'm a fool for my pains.

And my nephew said, there are a good many plays to be played for you, some to-night and some on other nights through the winter, and the most of them are simple enough, and tell out their story to the end. But as to the big play you are to see to-night, my nephew taught me to say what the poet had taught him to say about it. [*Puts down candlestick and puts right finger on left thumb.*] First, he who told the story of Seanchan on King Guaire's threshold long ago in the old books told it wrongly, for he was a friend of the king, or maybe afraid of the king, and so he put the king in the right. But he that tells the story now, being a poet, has put the poet in the right.

And then [*touches other finger*] I am to say: Some think it would be a finer tale if

## A PROLOGUE

Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had the guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, for if he that is in the story but a shadow and an image of poetry had not risen up from the death that threatened him, the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put into the voices of players and proclaimed in the mouths of trumpets, and poetry would have been badly served.

*[He takes up the candlestick again.]*

And as to what happened Seanchan after, my nephew told me he didn't know, and the poet didn't know, and it's likely there's nobody that knows. But my nephew thinks he never sat down at the king's table again, after the way he had been treated, but that he went to some quiet green place in the hills with Fedelm, his sweetheart, where the poor people made much of him because he was wise, and where he made songs and poems, and it's likely enough he made some

## A PROLOGUE

of the old songs and the old poems the poor people on the hillsides are saying and singing to-day. [*A trumpet-blast.*

Well, it's time for me to be going. That trumpet means that the curtain is going to rise, and after a while the stage there will be filled up with great ladies and great gentlemen, and poets, and a king with a crown on him, and all of them as high up in themselves with the pride of their youth and their strength and their fine clothes as if there was no such thing in the world as cold in the shoulders, and speckled shins, and the pains in the bones and the stiffness in the joints that make an old man that has the whole load of the world on him ready for his bed.

[*He begins to shuffle away, and then stops.*

And it would be better for me, that nephew of mine to be thinking less of his play-acting, and to have remembered to boil down the knap-weed with a bit of three-



## A PROLOGUE

penny sugar, for me to be wetting my throat with now and again through the night, and drinking a sup to ease the pains in my bones.

*[He goes out at side of stage.]*



## THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

SCENE: *Steps before the Palace of KING  
GUAIRE at Gort. A table in front of  
steps to right with food on it. SEANCHAN  
lying on steps to left. Pupils before steps.  
King on top of steps at centre.*

*King.* I welcome you that have the  
mastery

Of the two kinds of music ; the one kind  
Being like a woman, the other like a man ;  
Both you that understand stringed instru-  
ments,

And how to mingle words and notes to-  
gether

So artfully, that all the art is but speech  
Delighted with its own music ; and you  
that carry

The long twisted horn and understand



## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

The heady notes that being without words  
Can hurry beyond time and fate and change;  
For the high angels that drive the horse  
of time,

The golden one by day, by night the silver,  
Are not more welcome to one that loves the  
world

For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither  
To save the life of your great master,  
Seanchan,

For all day long it has flamed up or flickered  
To the fast-cooling hearth.

*Senias.* When did he sicken?  
Is it a fever that is wasting him?

*King.* He did not sicken, but three days  
ago  
He said he would not eat, and lay down  
there

And has not eaten since. Till yesterday  
I thought that hunger and weakness had  
been enough,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

But finding them too trifling and too light  
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave  
I called you hither, and have called others  
yet.

The girl he is to wed at harvest-time,  
That should be of all living the most dear,  
Is coming from the South, and had I known  
Of any other neighbours or good friends  
That might persuade him, I had brought  
them hither,  
Even though I'd to ransack the world for  
them.

*Senias.* What was it put him to this work,  
High King?

*King.* You will call it no great matter.  
Three days ago

I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers,  
Bishops, soldiers, and makers of the law,  
Who long had thought it against their  
dignity

For a mere man of words to sit among them  
At my own table; and when the meal was  
spread

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

I ordered Seanchan to good company,  
But to a lower table; and when he pleaded  
The poet's right, established when the world  
Was first established, I said that I was King  
And made and unmade rights at my own  
pleasure.

And that it was the men who ruled the  
world,

And not the men who sang to it, who should  
sit

Where there was the most honour. My  
courtiers,

Bishops, soldiers, and makers of the law  
Shouted approval, and amid that noise  
Seanchan went out, and from that hour to  
this,

Although there is good food and drink  
beside him,

Has eaten nothing. If a man is wronged,  
Or thinks that he is wronged, and will lie  
down

Upon another's threshold until he dies,  
The common people for all time to come



## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,  
Even though it is the King's. He lies there

now

Perishing; he is calling against my majesty,  
That old custom that has no meaning in it,  
And as he perishes, my name in the world  
Is perishing also. I cannot give way

Because I am King, because if I give way  
My nobles would call me a weakling, and  
it may be

The very throne be shaken; but should you  
That are his friends speak to him and  
persuade him

To turn his mouth from the ill-savouring  
grave

And eat good food, he shall not lack my  
favour;

For I will give plough-land and grazing-  
land,

Or all but anything he has set his heart on.

It is not all because of my good name

I'd have him live, for I have found him a  
man

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

That might well hit the fancy of a king  
Banished out of his country, or a woman's,  
Or any other's that can judge a man  
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,  
And take my measure from the needs of  
the state,  
Call his wild thought that over-runs the  
measure,  
Making words more than deeds, and his  
proud will  
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,  
And he himself a most mischievous man.

*Senias.* King, whether you did right or  
wrong in this

Let the King say, for all that I need say  
Is that there's nothing that cries out for  
death

In the withholding of that ancient right,  
And that I will persuade him. Your own  
words

Had been enough persuasion were it not  
That he is lost in dreams that hunger  
makes,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

And therefore heedless, or lost in heedless  
sleep.

*King.* I leave him to your love, that it  
may promise  
Plough-lands and grass-lands, jewels and  
silken wear,  
Or anything but that old right of the poets.

*[He goes out. The Pupils, who have been  
standing perfectly quiet, all turn  
towards SEANCHAN, and move a  
step nearer.]*

*Senias.* The King did wrong to abrogate  
our right,  
But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,  
Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan,  
Waken out of your dream and look at us,  
Who have ridden under the moon and all  
the day,  
Until the moon has all but come again,  
That we might be beside you.

*[SEANCHAN turns half round leaning on  
his elbow, and speaks as if in a  
dream.]*

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Seanchan.* I was but now  
At Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,  
With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast  
flesh

Rose round me and I saw the roasting spits,  
And then the dream was broken, and I saw  
Grania dividing salmon by a pool,  
And then I was awakened by your voice.

*Senias.* It is your hunger that makes you  
dream of flesh

Roasting, and for your hunger I could weep;  
And yet the hunger of the crane that starves  
Because the moonlight glittering on the pool  
And flinging a pale shadow has made it shy,  
Seems to me little more fantastical

Than this that's blown into so great a  
trouble.

*Seanchan.* [*Who has turned away again.*]  
There is much truth in that, for all things  
change

At times, as if the moonlight altered them,  
And my mind alters as if it were the crane's;  
For when the heavy body has grown weak



## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

There's nothing that can tether the wild  
mind

That being moonstruck and fantastical  
Goes where it fancies. I had even thought  
I knew your voice and face, but now the  
words

Are so unlikely that I needs must ask  
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by?

*Senias.* I am your oldest pupil, Seanchan;  
The one that has been with you many years,  
So many that you said at Candlemas  
That I had almost done with school, and  
knew

All but all that poets understand.

*Seanchan.* My oldest pupil. No, that  
cannot be;

For it is someone of the courtly crowds  
That have been round about me from sun-  
rise

And I am tricked by dreams, but I'll refute  
them.

I asked the pupil that I loved the best,  
At Candlemas, why poetry is honoured,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Wishing to know how he'd defend our craft  
In distant lands among strange churlish  
Kings.

And he'd an answer.

*Senias.* I said the poets hung  
Images of the life that was in Eden  
About the childbed of the world, that it,  
Looking upon those images, might bear  
Triumphant children; but why must I stand  
here

Repeating an old lesson while you starve?

*Seanchan.* Tell on, for I begin to know  
the voice;

What evil thing will come upon the world  
If the arts perish?

*Senias.* If the arts should perish  
The world that lacked them would be like  
a woman

That looking on the cloven lips of a hare  
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

*Seanchan.* But that's not all.  
For when I asked you how a man should  
guard

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Those images you had an answer also,  
If you're the man that you have claimed  
to be,

Comparing them to venerable things  
God gave to men before he gave them  
wheat.

*Senias.* I answered, and the word was  
half your own,  
That he should guard them, as the men of  
Dea

Guard their four treasures, as the Grail  
King guards.

His holy cup, or the pale righteous horse  
The jewel that is underneath his horn,  
Pouring out life for it, as one pours out  
Sweet heady wine—but now I under-  
stand

You would refute me out of my own mouth;  
And yet a place at table near the King  
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.  
How does so light a thing touch poetry?

[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still  
looks dreamily in front of him.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Seanchan.* At Candlemas you called this  
poetry  
One of the fragile mighty things of God  
That die at an insult.

*Senias.* [*To other Pupils.*] Give me some  
true answer.

For on that day we spoke about the court  
And said that all that was insulted there  
The world insulted, for the courtly life,  
Being the first comely child of the world,  
Is the world's model. How shall I answer  
him?

Can you not give me some true argu-  
ment?

I will not tempt him with a lying one.

*Arias.* [*Throwing himself at SEANCHAN'S  
feet.*] Why did you take me from  
my father's fields?

If you would leave me now, what shall I  
love?

Where shall I go, what shall I set my  
hand to?

And why have you put music in my ears



THE KING'S THRESHOLD

If you would send me to the clattering  
houses?

I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,  
For how could I sing verses or make music  
With none to praise me and a broken heart?

*Seanchan.* What was it that the poets  
promised you

If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.  
Have I not opened school on these bare  
steps,

And are not you the youngest of my  
scholars?

And I would have all know that when all  
falls

In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,  
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,  
The victim's joy among the holy flame,  
God's laughter at the shattering of the  
world,

And now that joy laughs out and weeps  
and burns

On these bare steps.

*Arias.*

O Master, do not die.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

[*Three men come in. CIAN and BRIAN, old men carrying basket with food, and MAYOR OF KINVARA. They stand at the side listening.*

*Senias.* Trouble him with no useless argument.

Be silent; there is nothing we can do  
Except find out the King and kneel to  
him

And beg our ancient right. These three  
have come

To say whatever we could say and more,  
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that's no use;  
[*He lifts the Boy up.*

If it seem well that we beseech the King,  
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the  
stones

In silence and come with me silently.  
Come with slow footfalls and bow all your  
heads,

For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.  
[*They lay the harps and trumpets down one by one and then go out very*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*solemnly and slowly, following one another.*

*Cian.* Let's show the food that's in the basket.

*Mayor.* [*Who carries an Ogham stick.*]

No,

I must get through my speech or I'll forget it ;

Besides, there is no reason why he'd eat  
Till he has heard my reasons.

*Cian.*

It were better

To show what we have brought him in the  
basket,

For we have nothing that he has not liked  
From boyhood.

*Brian.* For we have not brought kings'  
food

That's cooked for everybody and nobody.

*Mayor.* You are not showing right  
respect to me,

Or to the people of Kinvara, when you wish  
That something else should come before  
my message.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Seanchan.* What brings you here? I  
never sent for you.

*Cian.* He must be famishing, he looks  
so pale.

We had better get the food out first. I  
tell you,  
That we have brought the things he likes  
the best.

*Mayor.* No, no; I lost a word at every  
cross road  
And maybe if I do not speak it now  
I'll have forgot it.

*Cian.* Well, out with it quickly.

*Seanchan.* Why, what's this foolery?

*Mayor.* No foolery;  
A message from the richest, best born  
townsman  
Of your own town, and from your aged  
father.

*Cian.* Run through it while I am getting  
out the food.

*Mayor.* How was I to begin? What was  
the word



THE KING'S THRESHOLD

That was to keep it in my memory?

Wait, I have notched it on this Ogham  
stick.

“Chief poet,” “Ireland,” “Townsmen”;  
that is it.

Chief poet of Ireland, when we heard that  
trouble

Had come between you and the King of  
Ireland

It plunged us in deep sorrow, part for  
you,

Our honoured townsman, part for our good  
town.

The King was said to be most friendly to us,  
And we had reasons, as you'll recollect,  
For thinking that he was about to give  
Those grazing lands inland we so much  
need,

Being pinched between the water and the  
rocks.

But now his friendliness being ill repaid  
Will be turned from us and our town get  
nothing.

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

But there was something else—I'll find the  
word

That was to keep it in my memory.

"Pride"—that's the word,—we would not  
have you think,

Weighty as these considerations are,  
That they have been as weighty in our  
minds

As our desire that one we take much pride  
in,

A man who has been an honour to our town,  
Should live and prosper, therefore we be-  
seech you

To give way in a matter of no moment,  
A matter of mere sentiment, a trifle,  
That we may always keep our pride in you.

*Seanchan.* Their pride, their pride, what  
do they know of pride?

My pupils do not know it, for they beg  
From the King's favour what is theirs by  
right,

And how can men, that God has made so  
weak

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

They need a rich man's favour every day,  
Know anything of pride?

*Cian.* [*To MAYOR.*] You have spoken it  
wrongly.

You have forgotten something out of it  
about the cattle dying.

*Mayor.* Maybe you do not know, being  
much away,

How many of our cattle died last winter  
From lacking grass, and that there was  
much sickness

Because the poor had nothing but salt fish  
To live upon. The people all came out  
And stood about the doors as I went by.

*Seanchan.* What would you have of me?  
For there are men that shall be born at last  
And find sweet nurture that they may have  
voices

Even in anger like the strings of harps.  
Yet how could they be born to majesty  
If I had never made the golden cradle?

*Mayor.* What is it? "Father"—"Mother";  
that is it;

## THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Your father sends this message.

*Cian.* He is listening.

*Mayor.* He says that he is old and that  
he needs you,

And that the people will be pointing at him  
And he not able to lift up his head

If you should turn the King's favour away.  
And he adds to it, that he cared you well,  
And you in your young age, and that it's  
right

That you should care him now.

*Cian.* And when he spoke  
He cried because the stiffness of his bones  
Prevented him from coming.

*Mayor.* But your mother  
Has sent no message, for when they had  
told her

The way it is between you and the King  
She said, "No message can do any good,  
He will not send the answer that you want;  
We cannot change him," and she went in-  
doors,

Lay down upon her bed and turned her face

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Out of the light. And thereupon your father  
Said, "Tell him how she is, and that she  
sends

No message." I have nothing more to say.  
Cian and Brian, you can set out the food.

*[He sits down on steps. SEANCHAN is  
silent.]*

*Mayor.* I have a horse waiting outside  
the town  
To bring me home, and all the neighbours  
wait

Your answer. What answer am I to bring?  
*Seanchan.* Give them my answer—no, I  
have no answer:

My mother knew it.

*Mayor.* Maybe you have forgotten  
That all our fields are so heaped up with  
stones

That the goats famish, and the mowers mow  
With knives, and that the King half pro-  
mised us——

*Seanchan.* Thrust that old cloak of yours  
into your mouth



THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Till it's done gabbling.

*Mayor.* But——

*Cian.* You have said enough;  
I knew that you would never speak it right.

*Seanchan.* Our mothers know us, they  
know us to the bone,  
They knew us before birth, and that is why  
They know us even better than the sweet-  
hearts

Upon whose breasts we have lain.

*Brian.* We have brought your honour  
The food that you have always liked the  
best,

Young pigeons from Kinvara, and water-  
cress

Out of the stream that's by the blessed  
well,

And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse,  
your honour,

It is wholesome, and has the good taste of  
the sea.

*Seanchan.* O Brian, you would spread  
the table for me

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

As you would spread it when I was in my  
childhood;

But all that's finished.

*Mayor.* I knew he would not care  
For country things now that he's grown  
accustomed

To the King's dishes. I told Brian too  
He'd have his pains for nothing. But he's  
old.

[*Goes over to table at right. While he  
is speaking CIAN and BRIAN are in  
vain offering SEANCHAN food.*

And what dishes! Venison from Slieve  
Echtge

Fattened with poor men's crops; flesh of  
wild pig;

Not fat nor lean, but streaky and right well  
cured;

Bread that's the whitest that I've ever  
seen.

*Cian.* You're in the right, you're in the  
right, he will not eat.

[*Pouring wine into cup.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Mayor.* Bring him some wine, it will give him strength to eat.

[*BRIAN brings wine over towards*  
SEANCHAN.

No wonder if the King is proud and merry,  
And keeps all day in the saddle, when even I  
Am well-nigh drunken with the odour of it,  
And if I dared—I dare not.

*Cian.* Drink it, sir.

*Brian.* Drink a few drops.

*Seanchan.* Drink it yourself, old man,  
For you have come a journey, and I daresay  
You did not eat or drink upon the road.

*Cian.* How can I drink it when your  
honour's thirsty?

[*He offers cup again. The King's Household comes in. CHAMBERLAIN with long staff, a Soldier, a Monk, two Ladies, followed by Cripples who beg from the ladies, who keep close together at right, talking to each other at intervals. Soldier goes over to MAYOR, and talks to him.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Chamberlain.* Well, have you it in imagination still

To overthrow the dignity of the King,  
Or is the game finished? [*A pause.*

How many days  
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,  
With the King's nobles and myself and all  
Who'd gladly be your friends if you would  
let them?

*Soldier.* [*Who has been speaking to* MAYOR  
*and* Servants.] Was it you that sent  
his servants and the Mayor  
Of his own town to wheedle him into life?

*Chamberlain.* It was the King himself.

*Soldier.* Was it worth our while  
To have got rid of him from the King's table  
If he is to be humoured and made much of?

*Chamberlain.* It seems that he has not  
eaten yet, although  
He's had another dozen hours of hunger.

*Soldier.* If he's so proud and obstinate a  
neck  
I'd let him starve.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Monk.* Persuade him to eat, my lord.  
His death would make a scandal, and stir up  
The common people.

*Chamberlain.* And I have a fancy  
That if it brought misfortune on the King,  
Or the King's house, we'd be as little  
thought of

As summer linen when the winter's come.

*Aileen.* [*To CIAN.*] You've had no luck,  
old man.

*Cian.* We have not, lady.

*Aileen.* Maybe he's out of humour with  
your ways,

Having grown used to sprightlier service.

*Cian.* Maybe.

But the King's messengers have gone for  
one

That will persuade him. [*To BRIAN.*] Come,  
let us go;

For she might lose her way in this fine place.

Come, we have been too long upon the tree,

[*Plucking sleeve of* MAYOR.

And there are little golden pippins here.



THE KING'S THRESHOLD

*Soldier.* Give me the dish, I'll hand it  
him myself.

*Aileen.* I wonder if she is pretty.

[MAYOR *and* Servants *have gone out.*

*Soldier.* Eat this, old hedgehog.  
Sniff up the savour and unroll yourself.  
But if I were the King I'd make you do it  
With wisps of lighted straw.

*Seanchan.* You have rightly named me,  
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns  
That are upon the edge of those great  
waters

Where all things vanish away, and I have  
heard

Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.  
I am out of life, I am rolled up, and yet,  
Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll  
For you, King's dog. Go to the King, your  
master,

Crouch down and wag your tail, for it  
may be

He has nothing now against you, and I  
think

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

The stripes of your last beating are all  
healed.

*Chamberlain.* Don't answer, you were  
never to his mind.

And now you have angered him to no good  
purpose.

But put the dish down and I will speak to  
him.

*Seanchan.* You must needs keep your  
patience yet awhile,

For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air  
To swallow before I have grown to be as  
civil

As any other dust.

*Chamberlain.* You wrong us, Seanchan,  
There is none here but holds you in respect,  
And if you would only eat out of this dish  
The King would show howmuch he honours  
you.

*Aileen.* [*Giving Cripple money.*] You are  
always discontented. Look at this  
cripple,

He has had to cover up his eyes with rags

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

Because they are too weak to look at the  
sun,

And has a crooked body, and yet he is  
cheerful.

Stand there where he can see you.

[Cripple goes over and stands in front  
of SEANCHAN, bowing and smiling.

*Chamberlain.* We have come to you  
Because we wish you a long, prosperous life;  
Who could imagine you'd so take to heart  
Being put from the high table.

*Seanchan.* It was not I  
That you have driven away from the high  
table,

But the images of them that weave a dance,  
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

*Monk.* He means we have driven poetry  
away.

*Chamberlain.* It is the men who are  
learned in the laws,  
Or have led the King's armies that should  
sit

At the King's table. Nor has poetry

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

Been altogether driven away, for I,  
As you should know, have written poetry,  
And often when the table has been cleared  
And candles lighted, the King calls for me  
And I repeat it him. My poetry  
Is not to be compared with yours, but still  
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured  
In some measure.

*Seanchan.* If you are a poet,  
Cry out that the King's money would not  
buy,  
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,  
If poets had never christened gold, and even  
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-  
faced metal,  
Precious ; and cry out that none alive  
Would ride among the arrows with high  
heart  
Or scatter with an open hand, had not  
Our heady craft commended wasteful vir-  
tues.  
And when that story's finished, shake your  
coat

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

Where the little jewels gleam on it, and say  
A herdsman sitting where the pigs had  
trampled

Made up a song about enchanted kings,  
Who were so finely dressed one fancied  
them

All fiery, and women by the churn  
And children by the hearth caught up the  
song

And murmured it until the tailors heard it.

*Monk.* How proud these poets are! It  
was full time

To break their pride.

*Seanchan.* And I would have you say  
That when we are driven out we come  
again

Like a great wind that runs out of the waste  
To blow the tables flat.

*Chamberlain.* If you'd eat something  
You'd find you have these thoughts because  
you are hungry.

*Seanchan.* And when you have told them  
all these things, lie down



THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

On this bare threshold and starve until the  
King

Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

*Aileen.* Let's come away. There's no  
use talking to him,

For he's resolved to die, and that's no loss:  
We will go watch the hurley.

*Monk.* You should obey  
The King's commandment and not ques-  
tion it,  
For it is God himself who has made him  
king.

*Essa.* Let's hear his answer to the  
monk.

*Seanchan.* Stoop down,  
For there is something I would say to you.  
Has that wild God of yours that was so wild  
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,  
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much  
trouble

Being so unruly and inconsiderate.

*Aileen.* What does he mean?

*Monk.* Let go my habit, Seanchan.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Seanchan.* Or it may be you have persuaded him  
To chirp between two dishes when the  
King  
Sits down to table.

*Monk.* Let go my habit, sir.  
What do I care about your insolent dreams.

*Seanchan.* And maybe he has learnt to  
sing quite softly  
Because loud singing would disturb the  
King  
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends  
After the table has been cleared——

*Monk.* Let go.

[*SEANCHAN has been dragged some feet,  
clinging to the MONK's habit.*]

*Seanchan.* Not yet; you did not think  
that hungry hands  
Could be so strong. They are not civil  
yet—  
I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread  
From the King's hand, and perch upon his  
finger.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

I think he perches on the King's strong  
hand,

But it may be that he is still too wild.

You must not weary in your work ; a King  
Is often weary and he needs a God

To be a comfort to him.

[*The MONK plucks his habit away.*

*SEANCHAN holds up his hand as if  
a bird perched upon it. He pretends  
to stroke the bird.*

A little god,  
With soft well-coloured feathers, and bright  
eyes.

*Aileen.* We have listened long enough.

*Essa.* Let us away,

Where we can watch the young men at the  
hurley.

*Seanchan.* Yes, yes, go to the hurley, go  
to the hurley,

Go to the hurley, gather up your skirts,

Run quickly. You can remember many  
love songs ;

I know it by the light that's in your eyes,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

But you'll forget them. You're fair to look  
on,  
Your feet delight in dancing, and your  
mouths  
In the slow smiling that awakens love.  
The mothers that have borne you mated  
rightly,  
For they had little ears as thirsty as are  
yours  
For many love-songs. Go to the young  
men :  
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin  
flanks  
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire ?  
Go from me. Here is nothing for your  
eyes,  
But it is I that am singing you away,  
Singing you to the young men.

[*The two young PRINCESSES BUAN and  
FINNHUA come in. While he has  
been speaking AILEEN and ESSA  
have shrunk back holding each  
other's hands.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Aileen.* Be quiet ;  
Look who it is that has come out of the  
house.

Princesses, we are for the hurling field.  
Will you come too ?

*Princess Buan.* We will go with you,  
Aileen,  
But we must have some words with Sean-  
chan,  
For we have come to make him eat and  
drink.

*Chamberlain.* I will hold out the dish and  
cup for him  
While you are speaking to him of his  
folly,  
If you desire it, Princess.

*[He has taken up dish and cup.]*

*Princess Buan.* Give me the cup.  
My sister there will carry the dish of  
meat:  
We'll offer them ourselves.

*Aileen.* They are so gracious,  
The dear little princesses are so gracious.



THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

[PRINCESS BUAN *holds out her hand for*  
SEANCHAN *to kiss it ; he does not*  
*move.*

Although she is holding out her hand to him  
He will not kiss it.

*Princess Buan.* My father bids us say  
That though he cannot have you at his  
table,

You may ask any other thing you like  
And he will give it you. We carry you  
A dish and a cup of wine, with our own  
hands,

To show in what great honour you are held.  
Will you not drink a little? Does he not  
show

Every befitting honour to the poets?

*Aileen.* O look, he has taken it, he has  
taken it!

The dear princesses, I have always said  
That nobody could refuse them anything.

[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand,*  
*in the other he holds for a moment*  
*the hand of the PRINCESS.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Seanchan.* O long soft fingers and pale  
finger-tips

Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand ;  
O you have fair white hands, for it is  
certain

There is uncommon whiteness in these  
hands.

But there is something comes into my mind,  
Princess. A little while before your birth  
I saw your mother sitting by the road  
In a high chair, and when a leper passed  
She pointed him the way into the town,  
And he lifted his hand and blessed her  
hand ;

I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your  
hands,

I will find out if they are contaminated ;  
For it has come into my thoughts that  
may be

The King has sent me food and drink by  
hands

That are contaminated. I would see all your  
hands,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

You've eyes of dancers, but hold out your  
hands,  
For it may be there are none sound among  
you——

[*The PRINCESSES have shrunk back in  
terror.*

*Princess Buan.* He has called us lepers.

*Chamberlain.* He's out of his mind,  
And does not know the meaning of what  
he said.

*Seanchan.* [*Standing up.*] There are no  
sound hands among you. No sound  
hands.

Away with you, away with all of you,  
You are all lepers. There is leprosy  
Among the plates and dishes that you have  
brought me.

I would know why you have brought me  
leper's wine?

[*He flings the wine in their faces.*

There, there, I have given it to you again,  
and now

Begone or I will give my curse to you.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

You have the leper's blessing, but you think  
Maybe the bread will something lack in  
savour

Unless you mix my curse into the dough.

[*They go out to L., all except the  
Cripples. SEANCHAN is staggering  
in the middle of the stage.*

*Seanchan.* Where did I say the leprosy  
came from?

I said it came out of a leper's hand  
And that he walked the highway; but that's  
folly,

For he was walking up there in the sky  
And there he is even now with his white  
hand

Thrust out of the blue air and blessing  
them

With leprosy.

*A Cripple.* He's pointing at the moon  
That's coming out up yonder, and he calls it  
Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

*Seanchan.* He's holding up his hand  
above them all

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

King, Noblemen, Princesses, blessing all.  
Who could imagine he'd have so much  
patience.

*First Cripple.* Come out of this.

[*Clutching other Cripple.*

*Second Cripple.* If you don't need it, sir,  
May we not carry some of it away?

[*He points to food.*

*Seanchan.* Who's speaking? Who are  
you?

*First Cripple.* Come out of this.

*Second Cripple.* Have pity on us, that  
must beg our bread

From table to table throughout the entire  
world

And yet be hungry.

*Seanchan.* But why were you born  
crooked?

What bad poet did your mothers listen to  
That you were born so crooked?

*First Cripple.* Come away.

Maybe he's cursed the food and it might  
kill us.



THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Second Cripple.* Yes, better come away.

[*They go out.*]

*Seanchan.* [*Staggering and speaking wearily.*] He has great strength  
And great patience to hold his right hand  
there

Uplifted and not wavering about;  
He is much stronger than I am, much  
stronger. [*He sinks down on steps.*]

*Enter from R. FEDELM, CIAN and BRIAN.*

*Brian.* There he is lying. Go over to  
him now  
And bid him eat.

*Fedelm.* I'll get him out of this  
Before I have said a word of food and drink;  
For while he is on this threshold and can  
hear,  
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,  
He would not listen.

*Brian.* That is a good plan.  
But there is little time, for he is weakening.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Fedelm.* [*Crying.*] I cannot think of any  
other plan  
Although it breaks my heart.

*Cian.* Let's leave them now,  
For she will press the honey from her bag  
When we are gone.

*Brian.* It will be hard to move him  
If hunger and thirst have got into his  
bones.

[*They go out leaving FEDELM and  
SEANCHAN alone. FEDELM runs  
over to SEANCHAN and kneels down  
before him.*

*Fedelm.* Seanchan! Seanchan!

[*He remains looking into the sky.*

Can you not see me, Seanchan?  
It is myself.

[*SEANCHAN looks at her dreamily at  
first, then takes her hand.*

*Seanchan.* Is this your hand, Fedelm?  
I have been looking at another hand  
That is up yonder.

*Fedelm.* I have come for you.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Seanchan.* Fedelm, I did not know that  
you were here.

*Fedelm.* And can you not remember that  
I promised  
That I would come and take you home with  
me  
When I'd the harvest in? and now I've  
come,  
And you must come away, and come on the  
instant.

*Seanchan.* Yes, I will come; but is the  
harvest in?  
This air has got a summer taste in it.

*Fedelm.* But is not the wild middle of the  
summer  
A better time to marry? Come with me now.

*Seanchan.* [*Seizing her by both wrists.*]  
Who taught you that, for it's a certainty,  
Although I never knew it till last night,  
That marriage, because it is the height of  
life,  
Can only be accomplished to the full  
In the high days of the year. I lay awake,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

There had come a frenzy into the light of  
the stars

And they were coming nearer and I knew  
All in a minute they were about to marry  
Clods out upon the plough-lands, to beget  
A mightier race than any that has been ;  
But some that are within there made a  
noise

And frightened them away.

*Fedelm.* Come with me now ;  
We have far to go, and daylight's running  
out.

*Seanchan.* The stars had come so near  
me that I caught  
Their singing ; it was praise of that great  
race  
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-  
bodied  
With a high head, and open hand, and how  
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the  
world.

*Fedelm.* But you will tell me all about  
their songs

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

When we're at home. You have need of  
rest and care,  
And I can give them you when we're at  
home,  
And therefore let us hurry and get us  
home.

*Seanchan.* That's true; and there's some  
trouble here, although  
I cannot now remember what it is,  
And I would get away from it. Give me  
your help.

But why are not my pupils here to help me?  
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

*Fedelm.* Come with me now, and I will  
send for them,  
For I have a great room that's full of beds  
I can make ready, and there is a smooth  
lawn  
Where they can play at hurley and sing  
poems  
Under an apple-tree.

*Seanchan.* I know that place,  
An apple tree and a smooth level lawn,



THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

Where the young men can sway their hurley  
sticks.

*Sings.*

The four rivers that run there,  
Through well-mown level ground,  
Have come out of a blessed well  
That is all bound and wound  
By the great roots of an apple,  
And all fowls of the air  
Have gathered in the wide branches  
And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes  
with her hands.*

*Fedelm.* No, there are not four rivers,  
and those rhymes  
Praise Adam's Paradise.

*Seanchan.* I can remember now.  
It's out of a poem I made long ago  
About the garden in the east of the  
world,  
And how spirits in the images of birds  
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-  
tree;

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

They come before me now and dig in the  
fruit

With so much gluttony, and are so drunk  
With that harsh, wholesome savour that  
their feathers

Are clinging one to another with the juice.  
But you would take me to some friendly  
place,

And I would go there quickly.

*Fedelm.* Come with me.

*[She helps him to rise. He walks slowly,  
supported by her till he comes to the  
table at R.]*

*Seanchan.* But why am I so weak? Have  
I been ill?

Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak?

*[He sinks on to the seat.]*

*Fedelm.* I'll dip this piece of bread into  
the wine,

For that will make you stronger for the  
journey.

*Seanchan.* Yes, give me bread and wine,  
that's what I want,

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from FEDELM, hesitates,  
and then thrusts it back into her  
hand.*

But no, I must not eat it.

*Fedelm.*

Eat, Seanchan,

For if you do not eat it you will die.

*Seanchan.* Why did you give me food?

Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against

Without your coming?

*Fedelm.*

Eat this little crust,

Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

*Seanchan.* I must not eat it: but that's  
beyond your wit;

Child, child, I must not eat it though I  
die.

*Fedelm.* You do not know what love is,  
for if you loved

You would put every other thought away

But you have never loved me.

*Seanchan.* [*Seizing her by the wrist.*] You,  
a child.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

Who have but seen a man out of the window,  
dow,

Tell me that I know nothing about love,  
And that I do not love you. Did I not say  
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars  
All through the livelong night, and that the  
night

Was full of marriages? But that fight's  
over.

And all that's done with, and I have to die.

*Fedelm.* [*Throwing her arms about him.*]

I will not be put from you, although  
I think

I had not grudged it you if some great lady,  
If the King's daughter, had set out your  
bed.

I will not give you up to death; no, no,  
And are not these white arms and this soft  
neck

Better than the brown earth?

*Seanchan.*

I swear an oath  
Upon the holy tree that I'll not eat  
Until the King restore the right of the poets.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

O Sun and Moon, and all things that have  
strength,  
Become my strength that I may put a  
curse  
On all things that would have me break this  
oath.

[FEDELM *has sunk down on the ground  
while he says this, and crouches at  
his feet.*

*Fedelm.* Seanchan, do not curse me;  
from this out  
I will obey like any married wife.  
Let me but lie before your feet.

*Seanchan.*

Come nearer.

[*He kisses her.*

If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,  
The kiss of multitudes in times to come  
Had been the poorer.

*King.* [*Entering from house.*] Has he  
eaten yet?

*Fedelm.* No, King, and will not till you  
have restored  
The right of the poets.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*King.* [*Coming down and standing before*  
SEANCHAN.] Seanchan, you have  
refused

Everybody that I have sent, and now  
I come to you myself, and I have come  
To bid you put your pride as far away  
As I have put my pride. I had your  
love

Not a great while ago, and now you have  
planned

To put a voice by every cottage fire  
And in the night when no one sees who  
cries

To cry against me till my throne has  
crumbled.

And yet if I give way I must offend  
My courtiers and nobles till they too  
Strike at the crown. What would you have  
of me?

*Seanchan.* When did the poets promise  
safety, King?

*King.* Seanchan, I bring you bread in  
my own hands,



THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

And bid you eat it because of all these  
reasons,

And for this further reason that I love you.

[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away with*  
FEDELM'S *hand.*

You have refused it, Seanchan.

*Seanchan.* We have refused it.

*King.* I have been patient though I am  
a king,

And have the means to force you—but  
that's ended,

And I am but a king and you a subject.

[*He goes up steps.*

Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither  
For you can have your way : I that was man  
With a man's heart am now all king again,  
Remembering that the seed I come of,  
although

A hundred kings have sown it and re-  
sown it,

Has neither trembled nor shrunk backward  
yet

Because of the hard business of a king.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

[Princesses, Ladies, and Courtiers *have*  
*come in with Pupils, who have*  
*halters round their necks.*

Speak to your master, beg your life of him,  
Show him the halters that are round your  
necks ;

If his heart's set upon it he may die,  
But you shall all die with him ; beg your  
lives ;

Begin, for you have little time to lose ;  
Begin it you that are the oldest pupil.

*Senias.* [*Going up to SEANCHAN.*] Die,  
Seanchan, and proclaim the right of  
the poets.

*King.* Silence, you are as crazy as your  
master.

But that young boy that seems the youngest  
of you,

I'd have him speak. Kneel down before  
him, boy,

Hold up your hands to him that he may  
pluck

That milky coloured neck out of the noose.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

*Arias.* Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the  
right of the poets.

[*All the Pupils turn towards the KING,  
holding out the ends of their halters.*

*Senias.* Gather the halters up into your  
hands

And lead us where you will, for in all things  
But in our art we are obedient.

[*The KING comes slowly down the steps.*

*King.* [*Kneeling down before SEANCHAN.*]

Kneel down, kneel down, he has the  
greater power.

I give my crown to you.

[*All kneel except SEANCHAN, FEDELM  
and Pupils. SEANCHAN rises  
slowly, supported by one of the  
Pupils and by FEDELM.*

*Seanchan.* O crown, O crown,

It is but right if hands that made the crown  
In the old time should give it when they  
will.

O silver trumpets be you lifted up

[*He lays the crown on the KING's head.*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD.

And cry to the great race that is to come.  
Long-throated swans among the waves of  
time  
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the  
world  
It waits and it may hear and come to us.  
[*Some of the Pupils blow a blast upon  
their horns.*]

CURTAIN.

# ON BAILE'S STRAND





## ON BAILE'S STRAND.

CUCHULLAIN, the King of Muirthemne.

CONCOBAR, the High King of Ullad.

DAIRE, a King.

FINTAIN, a blind man.

BARACH, a fool.

A Young Man.

Young Kings and Old Kings.

SCENE: *A great hall by the sea close to Dundalgan. There are two great chairs on either side of the hall, each raised a little from the ground, and on the back of the one chair is carved and painted a woman with a fish's tail, and on the back of the other a hound. There are smaller chairs and benches raised in tiers round the walls. There is a great ale vat at one side near a small door, and a large door at the back through which one can see the sea.* BARACH, a

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*tall thin man with long ragged hair, dressed in skins, comes in at the side door. He is leading FINTAIN, a fat blind man, who is somewhat older.*

*Barach.* I will shut the door, for this wind out of the sea gets into my bones, and if I leave but an inch for the wind there is one like a flake of sea-frost that might come into the house.

*Fintain.* What is his name, fool?

*Barach.* It's a woman from among the Riders of the Sidhe. It's Boann herself from the river. She has left the Dagda's bed, and gone through the salt of the sea and up here to the strand of Baile, and all for love of me. Let her keep her husband's bed, for she'll have none of me. Nobody knows how lecherous these goddesses are. I see her in every kind of shape but oftener than not she's in the wind and cries "give a kiss and put your arms about me." But no, she'll have no more of me. Yesterday

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

when I put out my lips to kiss her, there was nothing there but the wind. She's bad, Fintain. O, she's bad. I had better shut the big door too.

*[He is going towards the big door but turns hearing FINTAIN'S voice.]*

*Fintain.* *[Who has been feeling about with his stick.]* What's this and this?

*Barach.* They are chairs.

*Fintain.* And this?

*Barach.* Why, that's a bench.

*Fintain.* And this?

*Barach.* A big chair.

*Fintain.* *[Feeling the back of the chair.]* There is a sea-woman carved upon it.

*Barach.* And there is another big chair on the other side of the hall.

*Fintain.* Lead me to it. *[He mutters while the fool is leading him.]* That is what the High King Concobar has on his shield. The High King will be coming. They have brought out his chair. *[He begins feeling the back of the other chair.]* And there is a

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

dog's head on this. They have brought out our master's chair. Now I know what the horse-boys were talking about. We must not stay here. The Kings are going to meet here. Now that Concobar and our master, that is his chief man, have put down all the enemies of Ullad, they are going to build up Emain again. They are going to talk over their plans for building it. Were you ever in Concobar's town before it was burnt? O, he is a great King, for though Emain was burnt down, every war had made him richer. He has gold and silver dishes, and chessboards and candlesticks made of precious stones. Fool, have they taken the top from the ale vat?

*Barach.* They have.

*Fintain.* Then bring me a horn of ale quickly, for the Kings will be here in a minute. Now I can listen. Tell me what you saw this morning?

*Barach.* About the young man and the fighting?

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Fintain.* Yes.

*Barach.* And after that we can go and eat the fowl, for I am hungry.

*Fintain.* Time enough, time enough. You're in as great a hurry as when you brought me to Aine's Seat, where the mad dogs gather when the moon's at the full. Go on with your story.

*Barach.* I was creeping under a ditch, with the fowl in my leather bag, keeping to the shore where the farmer could not see me, when I came upon a ship drawn up upon the sands, a great red ship with a woman's head upon it.

*Fintain.* A ship out of Aoife's country. They have all a woman's head on the bow.

*Barach.* There was a young man with a pale face and red hair standing beside it. Some of our people came up whose turn it was to guard the shore. I heard them ask the young man his name. He said he was under bonds not to tell it. Then words

came between them, and they fought, and the young man killed half of them, and the others ran away.

*Fintain.* It matters nothing to us, but he has come at last.

*Barach.* Who has come?

*Fintain.* I know who that young man is. There is not another like him in the world. I saw him when I had my eyesight.

*Barach.* You saw him?

*Fintain.* I used to be in Aoife's country when I had my eyesight.

*Barach.* That was before you went on shipboard and were blinded for putting a curse on the wind?

*Fintain.* Queen Aoife had a son that was red haired and pale faced like herself, and everyone said that he would kill Cuchullain some day, but I would not have that spoken of.

*Barach.* Nobody could do that. Who was his father?



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Fintain.* Nobody but Aoife knew that, not even he himself.

*Barach.* Not even he himself! Was Aoife a goddess and lecherous?

*Fintain.* I overheard her telling that she never had but one lover, and that he was the only man who overcame her in battle. There were some who thought him one of the Riders of the Sidhe, because the child was great of limb and strong beyond others. The child was begotten over the mountains; but come nearer and I will tell you something.

*Barach.* You have thought something?

*Fintain.* When I hear the young girls talking about the colour of Cuchullain's eyes, and how they have seven colours, I have thought about it. That young man has Aoife's face and hair, but he has Cuchullain's eyes. ]

*Barach.* How can he have Cuchullain's eyes?

*Fintain.* He is Cuchullain's son. X

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Barach.* And his mother has sent him hither to fight his father.

*Fintain.* It is all quite plain. Cuchullain went into Aoife's country when he was a young man that he might learn skill in arms, and there he became Aoife's lover.

*Barach.* And now she hates him because he went away, and has sent the son to kill the father. I knew she was a goddess.

*Fintain.* And she never told him who his father was, that he might do it. I have thought it all out, fool. I know a great many things because I listen when nobody is noticing and I keep my wits awake. What ails you now?

*Barach.* I have remembered that I am hungry.

*Fintain.* Well, forget it again, and I will tell you about Aoife's country. It is full of wonders. There are a great many Queens there who can change themselves into wolves and into swine and into white hares, and when they are in their own shapes they

are stronger than almost any man; and there are young men there who have cat's eyes and if a bird chirrup or a mouse squeak they cannot keep them shut, even though it is bedtime and they sleepy; and listen, for this is a great wonder, a very great wonder: there is a long narrow bridge, and when anybody goes to cross it, that the Queens do not like, it flies up as this bench would if you were to sit on the end of it. Everybody who goes there to learn skill in arms has to cross it. It was in that country too that Cuchullain got his spear made out of dragon bones. There were two dragons fighting in the foam of the sea, and their grandam was the moon, and nine Queens came along the shore.

*Barach.* I won't listen to your story.

*Fintain.* It is a very wonderful story. Wait till you hear what the nine Queens did. Their right hands were all made of silver.

*Barach.* No, I will have my dinner first. You have eaten the fowl I left in front of

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

the fire. / The last time you sent me to steal something you made me forget all about it till you had eaten it up.

*Fintain.* No, there is plenty for us both.

*Barach.* Come with me where it is.

*Fintain.* [*Who is being led towards the door at the back by BARACH.*] O, it is all right, it is in a safe place.

*Barach.* It is a fine fowl. It was the biggest in the yard.

*Fintain.* It had a good smell, but I hope that the wild dogs have not smelt it. [*Voices are heard outside the door at the side.*] Here is our master. Let us stay and talk with him. Perhaps Cuchullain will give you a new cap with a feather. He told me that he would give you a new cap with a feather, a feather with an eye that looks at you, a peacock's feather.

*Barach.* No, no.

[*He begins pulling FINTAIN towards the door.*]

*Fintain.* If you do not get it now, you

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

may never get it, for the young man may } *kill*  
kill him.

*Barach.* No, no, I am hungry. What a head you have, blind man! Who but you would have remembered that the hen-wife slept for a little at noon every day!

*Fintain.* [*Who is being led along very slowly and unwillingly.*] Yes, I have a good head. The fowl should be done just right, but one never knows when a wild dog may come out of the woods. }

[*They go out through the big door at the back. As they go out CUCHULLAIN and certain YOUNG KINGS come in at the side door. CUCHULLAIN, though still young, is a good deal older than the others. They are all very gaily dressed, and have their hair fastened with balls of gold. The young men crowd about CUCHULLAIN with wondering attention.*]

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*First Young King.* You have hurled that  
stone beyond our utmost mark  
Time after time, but yet you are not weary.

*Second Young King.* He has slept on the  
bare ground of Fuad's Hill  
This week past, waiting for the bulls and  
the deer.

*Cuchullain.* Well, why should I be weary?

*First Young King.* It is certain  
His father was the god who wheels the sun,  
And not King Sualtam.

*Third Young King.* [*To a YOUNG KING  
who is beside him.*] He came in the dawn,  
And folded Dectara in a sudden fire.

*Fourth Young King.* And yet the mother's  
half might well grow weary,  
And it new come from labours over sea.

*Third Young King.* He has been on  
islands walled about with silver,  
And fought with giants.

[*They gather about the ale vat and  
begin to drink.*]

*Cuchullain.* Who was it that went out?



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Third Young King.* As we came in?

*Cuchullain.* Yes.

*Third Young King.* Barach and blind  
Fintain.

*Cuchullain.* They always flock together;  
the blind man

Has need of the fool's eyesight and strong  
body,

While the poor fool has need of the other's  
wit,

And night and day is up to his ears in mis-  
chief

That the blind man imagines. There's no  
hen-yard

But clucks and cackles when he passes by

As if he'd been a fox. If I'd that ball

That's in your hair and the big stone again,

I'd keep them tossing, though the one is  
heavy

And the other light in the hand. A trick I  
learnt

When I was learning arms in Aoife's  
country.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*First Young King.* What kind of woman  
was that Aoife?

*Cuchullain.* Comely.

*First Young King.* But I have heard  
that she was never married,  
And yet that's natural, for I have never  
known

A fighting woman, but made her favours  
cheap,

Or mocked at love till she grew sandy dry.

*Cuchullain.* What manner of woman do  
you like the best?

A gentle or a fierce?

*First Young King.* A gentle, surely.

*Cuchullain.* I think that a fierce woman's  
better, a woman

That breaks away when you have thought  
her won,

For I'd be fed and hungry at one time.

I think that all deep passion is but a kiss

In the mid battle, and a difficult peace

'Twixt oil and water, candles and dark night,  
Hill-side and hollow, the hot-footed sun,

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

And the cold sliding slippery-footed moon,  
A brief forgiveness between opposites  
That have been hatreds for three times the  
age  
Of this long 'stablished ground. Here's  
Concobar;  
So I'll be done, but keep beside me still,  
For while he talks of hammered bronze  
and asks  
What wood is best for building, we can talk  
Of a fierce woman.

[CONCOBAR, *a man much older than*  
CUCHULLAIN, *has come in through*  
*the great door at the back. He has*  
*many Kings about him. One of*  
*these Kings, DAIRE, a stout old*  
*man, is somewhat drunk.*

*Concobar. [To one of those about him.]*

Has the ship gone yet?

We have need of more bronze workers, and  
that ship

I sent to Africa for gold is late.

*Cuchullain.* I knew their talk.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Concobar.* [*Seeing CUCHULLAIN.*] You are  
before us, King.

*Cuchullain.* So much the better, for I  
welcome you  
Into my Muirthemne.

*Concobar.* But who are these?  
The odour from their garments when they  
stir

Is like a wind out of an apple garden.

*Cuchullain.* My swordsmen and harp  
players and fine dancers,  
My bosom friends.

*Concobar.* I should have thought, Cu-  
chullain,  
My graver company would better match  
Your greatness and your years; but I waste  
breath  
In harping on that tale.

*Cuchullain.* You do, great King.  
Because their youth is the kind wandering  
wave  
That carries me about the world; and if it  
sank,

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

My sword would lose its lightness. ~~in pity~~

*Concobar.*

Yet, Cuchullain,

Emain should be the foremost town of the  
world.

*Cuchullain.* It is the foremost town.

*Concobar.*

No, no, it's not.

Nothing but men can make towns great,  
and he,

The one over-topping man that's in the  
world,

Keeps far away.

*Daire.*

He will not hear you, King,

And we old men had best keep company

With one another. I'll fill the horn for you.

*Concobar.* I will not drink, old fool. You  
have drunk a horn

At every door we came to.

*Daire.*

You'd better drink,

For old men light upon their youth again

In the brown ale. When I have drunk  
enough,

I am like Cuchullain as one pea another,

And live like a bird's flight from tree to tree.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Concobar.* We'll to our chairs for we have  
much to talk of,  
And we have Ullad and Muirthemne, and  
here  
Is Conall Muirthemne in the nick of time.

*[He goes to the back of stage to welcome  
a company of Kings who come in  
through the great door. The other  
Kings gradually get into their  
places. CUCHULLAIN sits in his  
great chair with certain of the  
young men standing around him.  
Others of the young men, however,  
remain with DAIRE at the ale vat.  
DAIRE holds out the horn of ale to  
one or two of the older Kings as  
they pass him going to their places.  
They pass him by, most of them  
silently refusing.]*

*Daire.* Will you not drink?

*An Old King.* Not till the council's  
over.

*A Young King.* But I'll drink, Daire.



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Another Young King.* Fill me a horn  
too, Daire.

*Another Young King.* If I'd drunk half  
that you have drunk to-day,  
I'd be upon all fours.

*Daire.* That would be natural  
When Mother Earth had given you this  
good milk  
From her great breasts.

*Cuchullain.* [*To one of the YOUNG KINGS  
beside him.*] One is content awhile  
With a soft warm woman who folds up our  
lives  
In silky network. Then, one knows not  
why,

But one's away after a flinty heart.

*The Young King.* How long can the net  
keep us?

*Cuchullain.* All our lives  
If there are children, and a dozen moons  
If there are none, because a growing child  
Has so much need of watching it can make  
A passion that's as changeable as the sea

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Change till it holds the wide earth to its  
heart.

At least I have heard a father say it, but I  
Being childless do not know it. Come  
nearer yet;

Though he is ringing that old silver rod  
We'll have our own talk out. They cannot  
hear us.

[CONCOBAR *who is now seated in his  
great chair, opposite CUCHULLAIN,  
beats upon the pillar of the house  
that is nearest to him with a rod  
of silver, till the Kings have become  
silent. CUCHULLAIN alone continues  
to talk in a low voice to those about  
him, but not so loud as to disturb  
the silence. CONCOBAR rises and  
speaks standing.*

*Concobar.* I have called you hither, Kings  
of Ullad, and Kings  
Of Muirthemne and Connall Muirthemne,  
And tributary Kings, for now there is  
peace—

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

It's time to build up Emain that was burned  
At the outset of these wars; for we,  
Being the foremost men, should have high  
chairs

And be much stared at and wondered at,  
and speak

Out of more laughing overflowing hearts  
Than common men. It is the art of kings  
To make what's noble nobler in men's eyes  
By wide uplifted roofs, where beaten gold,  
That's ruddy with desire, marries pale silver  
Among the shadowing beams; and many a  
time

I would have called you hither to this work,  
But always, when I'd all but summoned you,  
Some war or some rebellion would break  
out.

*Daire.* Where's Maine Morgor and old  
Usnach's children,

And that high-headed even-walking Queen,  
And many near as great that got their death  
Because you hated peace? I can remember  
The people crying out when Deirdre passed

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

And Maine Morgor had a cold gray eye.  
Well, well, I'll throw this heel-tap on the  
ground,

For it may be they are thirsty.

*A King.* Be silent, fool.

*Another King.* Be silent, Daire.

*Concobar.* Let him speak his mind.

I have no need to be afraid of ghosts,  
For I have made but necessary wars.  
I warred to strengthen Emain, or be-  
cause

When wars are out they marry and beget  
And have their generations like mankind  
And there's no help for it; but I'm well  
content

That they have ended and left the town so  
great,

That its mere name shall be in times to  
come

Like a great ale vat where the men of the  
world

Shall drink no common ale but the hard  
will,

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

The unquenchable hope, the friendliness of  
the sword.

*[He takes thin boards on which plans  
have been carved by those about him.]*

Give me the building plans, and have you  
written

That we—Cuchullain is looking in his  
shield ;

It may be the pale riders of the wind  
Throw pictures on it, or that Mananan,  
His father's friend and sometime fosterer,  
Foreknower of all things, has cast a vision,  
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea,  
Foretelling Emain's greatness.

*Cuchullain.* No, great King,  
I looked on this out of mere idleness,  
Imagining a far-off country and one  
That held it with a sword, although a  
woman.

*Concobar.* A woman needs but laugh, or  
a friend sigh,  
And you're afar off sounding through the  
world,

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

While I plan Emain's greatness.

[*The sound of a trumpet without.*

Open the doors !

I hear a herald's trumpet, and await,  
It may be, the heavy fleeces of the sea  
And golden and silver apples or ancient  
crowns

Long hidden in the well at the World's End,  
Or glittering garments of the salmon,  
tributes

From the Great Plain, or the high people  
of Sorcha,

Or the walled garden in the east of the  
world.

[*The great door at the back is flung open ;  
a Young Man, who is fully armed  
and carries a shield with a woman's  
head painted on it, stands upon the  
threshold. Behind him are trum-  
peters. He walks into the centre of  
the hall, the trumpeting ceases.*

What is your message ?

*Young Man.* I am of Aoife's army.



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*First King.* Queen Aoife and her army  
have fallen upon us.

*Second King.* Out swords! Out swords!

*Third King.* They are about the house.

*Fourth King.* Rush out! Rush out! Be-  
fore they have fired the thatch.

*Young Man.* Aoife is far away. I am  
alone.

I have come alone in the midst of you  
To weigh this sword against Cuchullain's  
sword.

[*There is a murmur amongst the Kings.*

*Concobar.* And are you noble? for if of  
common seed

You cannot weigh your sword against his  
sword

But in mixed battle.

*Young Man.* I am under bonds

To tell my name to no man, but it's noble.

*Concobar.* But I would know your name  
and not your bonds.

You cannot speak in the Assembly House  
If you are not noble.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*A King.* Answer the High King.

*Young Man.* [*Drawing his sword.*] I will  
give no other proof than the hawk  
gives

That it's no sparrow.

[*He is silent a moment, then speaks to all.*

Yet look upon me, Kings;  
I too am of that ancient seed and carry  
The signs about this body and in these  
bones.

*Cuchullain.* To have shown the hawk's  
gray feather is enough,  
And you speak highly too.

[*CUCHULLAIN comes down from his great  
chair. He remains standing on the  
steps of the chair. The Young  
Kings gather about him and begin  
to arm him.*

Give me that helmet!  
I'd thought they had grown weary sending  
champions.

That leathern coat will do. The High King  
there

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Being old in wisdom can think of times to  
come,

But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved  
Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen  
Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.

What's Emain to the hawk when that clear  
eye

Is burning nearer up in the high air?

That buckle should be tighter. Give me  
your shield.

There is good level ground at Baile's Yew-  
tree,

Some dozen yards from here, and it's but  
truth

That I am sad to-day and this fight welcome.

*[He looks hard at the Young Man, and  
then steps down on the floor of the  
Assembly House. He grasps the  
Young Man by the shoulder.]*

Hither into the light.

*[Turning to one of the Young Kings.]*

The very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now:

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Not a pin's difference. [*To the Young Man.*

You are from the North,  
Where there are many that have that tint  
of hair,

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come  
nearer, boy!

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness, a pale, a stone pale  
cheek.

What brought you, boy? Have you no fear  
of death?

*Young Man.* Whether I live or die is in  
the Gods' hands.

*Cuchullain.* That is all words, all words,  
a young man's talk;

I am their plough, their harrow, their very  
strength,

For he that's in the sun begot this body  
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell  
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,  
That he must always follow through waste  
heaven,

He loved so happily. He'll be but slow

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.  
Let's see that arm; I'll see it if I like.  
That arm had a good father and a good  
mother,  
But it is not like this.

*Young Man.* You are mocking me.  
You think I am not worthy to be fought,  
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative  
knife.

*Cuchullain.* Put up your sword, I am not  
mocking you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not  
Because you have a hot heart and a cold  
eye

I cannot tell the reason. You've got her  
fierceness,

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.

[*To the Young Kings.*

We'll keep him here in Muirthemne awhile.

*A Young King.* You are the leader of  
our pack and therefore

May cry what you will.

*Cuchullain.* You'll stop with us

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

And we will hunt the deer and the wild  
bulls,

And, when we have grown weary, light our  
fires

In sandy places where the wool-white foam  
Is murmuring and breaking, and it may be  
That long-haired women will come out of  
the dunes

To dance in the yellow fire-light. You hang  
your head,

Young man, as if it was not a good life;  
And yet what's better than to hurl the spear,  
And hear the long-remembering harp, and  
dance?

Friendship grows quicker in the murmuring  
dark;

But I can see there's no more need for words  
And that you'll be my friend now.

*First Old King.*

Concobar,

Forbid their friendship, for it will get twisted  
To a reproach against us.

*Concobar.*

Until now

I'd never need to cry Cuchullain on



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

And would not now.

*First Old King.* They'll say his man-  
hood's quenched.

*Cuchullain.* I'll give you gifts, but I'll  
have something too,

An arm-ring or the like, and if you will  
We'll fight it out when you are older, boy.

*An Old King.* Aoife will make some  
story out of this.

*Cuchullain.* Well, well, what matter, I'll  
have that arm-ring, boy.

*Young Man.* There is no man I'd sooner  
have my friend

Than you whose name has gone about the  
world

As if it had been the wind, but Aoife'd say  
I had turned coward.

*Cuchullain.* I'll give you gifts  
That Aoife'll know and all her people know  
To have been my gifts. Mananan, son of the  
sea,

Gave me this heavy embroidered cloak.  
Nine Queens

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Of the Land-under-Wave had woven it  
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her  
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.  
No! tell her that I heard a raven croak  
On the north side of the house and was  
afraid.

*An Old King.* Some witch of the air has  
troubled Cuchullain's mind.

*Cuchullain.* No witchcraft, his head is  
like a woman's head

I had a fancy for.

*Second Old King.* A witch of the air  
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.  
They have gone to school to learn the trick  
of it.

*Cuchullain.* But there's no trick in this.  
That arm-ring, boy.

*Third Old King.* He shall not go un-  
fought, I'll fight with him.

*Fourth Old King.* No! I will fight with  
him.

*First Old King.* I claim the fight,  
For when we sent an army to her land——

ON BAILE S STRAND.

*Second Old King.* I claim the fight, for  
one of Aoife's galleys  
Stole my great cauldron and a herd of pigs.

*Third Old King.* No, no, I claim it, for  
at Lammas' time——

*Cuchullain.* Back! Back! Put up your  
swords! Put up your swords!  
There's none alive that shall accept a  
challenge

I have refused. Laegaire, put up your  
sword.

*Young Man.* No, let them come, let any  
three together.  
If they've a mind to, I'll try it out with  
four.

*Cuchullain.* That's spoken as I'd spoken  
it at your age,  
But you are in my house. Whatever man  
Would fight with you shall fight it out with  
me.

They're dumb. They're dumb. How many  
of you would meet

[*Drawing his sword.*

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-  
piper,

This edge that's grayer than the tide, this  
mouse

That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,  
This, this—Boy, I would meet them all in  
arms

If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me  
When I have withstood for the last time the  
men

Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends  
I have killed

Upholding Ullad; when the four provinces  
Have gathered with the ravens over them.

But I'd need no avenger. You and I  
Would scatter them like water from a  
dish.

*Young Man.* We'll stand by one another  
from this out.

Here is the ring.

*Cuchullain.* No, turn and turn about,  
But my turn is first, because I am the  
older.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Clodna embroidered these bird wings, but

Fand

Made all these little golden eyes with the

hairs

That she had stolen out of Aengus' beard,

And therefore none that has this cloak

about him

Is crossed in love. The heavy inlaid brooch

That Buan hammered has a merit too.

*[He begins spreading the cloak out on a bench, showing it to the Young Man. Suddenly CONCOBAR beats with his silver rod on a pillar beside his chair. All turn towards him.]*

*Concobar.* *[In a loud voice.]* No more of that, I will not have this friendship.

Cuchullain is my man and I forbid it;

He shall not go unfought for I myself——

*Cuchullain.* *[Seizing CONCOBAR.]* You shall not stir, High King, I'll hold you there.

*Concobar.* Witchcraft has maddened you.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

[ *The Kings.* [*Shouting.*] Yes, witchcraft,  
witchcraft.

*A King.* You saw another's head upon  
his shoulders

All of a sudden, a woman's head, Cuchullain.  
Then raised your hand against the King of  
Ullad.

*Cuchullain.* [*Letting CONCOBAR go, and  
looking wildly about him.*] Yes, yes,  
all of a sudden, all of a sudden.

*Daire.* Why, there's no witchcraft in it,  
I myself  
Have made a hundred of these sudden  
friendships  
And fought it out next day. But that was  
folly,  
For now that I am old I know it is best  
To live in comfort.

*A King.* Pull the fool away!

*Daire.* I'll throw a heel-tap to the one  
that dies.

*Concobar.* Some witch is floating in the  
air above us.



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Cuchullain.* Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft  
and the power of witchcraft.

[*To the Young Man.*

Why did you do it? was it Calatin's  
daughters?

Out, out, I say, for now it's sword on sword.

*Young Man.* But, but, I did not.

*Cuchullain.* Out, I say, out, out!

Sword upon sword.

[*He goes towards the door at back,  
followed by Young Man. He  
turns on the threshold and cries  
out, looking at the Young Man.*

That hair my hands were drowned in!

[*He goes out, followed by Young Man.  
The other Kings begin to follow  
them out.*

*A King.* I saw him fight with Ferdiad.

*Second King.* We'll be too late,

They're such a long time getting through  
the door.

*Third King.* Run quicker, quicker.

*Daire.* I was at the Smith's

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

When he that was the boy Setanta then——

*[Sound of fighting outside.]*

*Third King.* He will have killed him.  
They have begun the fight!

*[They all go out, leaving the house silent and empty. There is a pause during which one hears the clashing of the swords. BARACH and FINTAIN come in from side door. BARACH is dragging FINTAIN.]*

*Barach.* You have eaten it, you have eaten it, you have left me nothing but the bones.

*Fintain.* O, that I should have to endure such a plague. O, I ache all over. O, I am pulled in pieces. This is the way you pay me for all the good I have done you!

*Barach.* You have eaten it, you have told me lies about a wild dog. Nobody has seen a wild dog about the place this twelve month. Lie there till the Kings come. O, I will tell Concobar and Cuchullain and all the Kings about you!

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Fintain.* What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you what would you do for food and warmth?

*Barach.* You take care of me? You stay safe and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gull's eggs, while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun. And then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. [*The blind man tries to rise. BARACH makes him lie down again.*] Keep quiet now till I shut the door. There is some noise outside. There are swords crossing; a high vexing noise so that I can't be listening to myself. [*He goes to the big door at the back and shuts it.*] Why can't they be quiet, why can't they be quiet! Ah, you would get away, would you? [*He follows the blind man who has been crawling along the wall and makes him lie down close to the KING's chair.*] Lie there, lie there. No, you won't get away. Lie there till the

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

Kings come, I'll tell them all about you. I shall tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows and the rainy side when it rains ?

*Fintain.* O good fool, listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there, you were always wandering about.

*Barach.* The last time you brought me in, it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot, when you thought nobody was looking. Keep quiet now, keep quiet till I shut the door. Here is Cuchullain, now you will be beaten. I am going to tell him everything.

*Cuchullain.* [*Comes in and says to the fool.*] Give me that horn.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

[*The fool gives him a horn which  
CUCHULLAIN fills with ale and  
drinks.*

*Fintain.* Do not listen to him, listen to me.

*Cuchullain.* What are you wrangling over?

*Barach.* He is fat and good for nothing. He has left me the bones and the feathers.

*Cuchullain.* What feathers?

*Barach.* I left him turning a fowl at the fire. He ate it all. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers.

*Fintain.* Do not believe him. You do not know how vain this fool is. I gave him the feathers, because I thought he would like nothing so well.

[*BARACH is sitting on a bench playing  
with a heap of feathers, which he  
has taken out of the breast of his  
coat.*

*Barach.* [*Singing.*] When you were an acorn on the tree top——

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Fintain.* Where would he be but for me?  
I must be always thinking, thinking to get  
food for the two of us, and when we've  
got it, if the moon's at the full or the tide  
on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in its  
snare till it is full of maggots, or let the  
trout slip through his hands back into the  
water.

*Barach.* [*Singing.*] When you were an  
acorn on the tree top,  
Then was I an eagle cock;  
Now that you are a withered old block,  
Still am I an eagle cock!

*Fintain.* Listen to him now! That's the  
sort of talk I have to put up with, day out  
day in.

[*The fool is putting the feathers into  
his hair. CUCHULLAIN takes a  
handful of feathers out of the heap  
and out of the fool's hair, and  
begins to wipe the blood from his  
sword with them.*

*Barach.* He has taken my feathers to



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword!

*Fintain.* Whose blood? Whose blood?

*Cuchullain.* That young champion's.

*Fintain.* He that came out of Aoife's country?

*Cuchullain.* The Kings are standing round his body.

*Fintain.* Did he fight long?

*Cuchullain.* He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

*Barach.* That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

*Cuchullain.* [*To the blind man.*] You knew him, then?

*Fintain.* I saw him when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

*Cuchullain.* You were in Aoife's country?

*Fintain.* I knew him and his mother there.

*Cuchullain.* He was about to speak of her when he died.

*Fintain.* He was a Queen's son.

*Cuchullain.* What Queen, what Queen? [*He seizes the blind man.*] Was it Scathach? There were many Queens. All the rulers were Queens.

*Fintain.* No, not Scathach.

*Cuchullain.* It was Uathach, then. Speak, speak!

*Fintain.* I cannot speak, you are clutching me too tightly. [*CUCHULLAIN lets him go.*] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some Queen.

*Barach.* He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

*Cuchullain.* She? No, no, she had no son when I was there.

*Barach.* That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

*Cuchullain.* I had rather he had been

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman, a proud, pale amorous woman.

*Fintain.* None knew whose son he was.

*Cuchullain.* None knew? Did you know, old listener at doors?

*Fintain.* No, no, I knew nothing.

*Barach.* He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [A pause.

*Fintain.* Somebody is trembling. Why are you trembling, fool? the bench is shaking, why are you trembling? Is Cuchullain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchullain.

*Barach.* It is Cuchullain who is trembling. He is shaking the bench with his knees.

*Cuchullain.* He was my son, and I have killed my son. [A pause.

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

'Twas they that did it, the pale windy  
people,

Where, where, where? My sword against  
the thunder.

But no, for they have always been my  
friends;

And though they love to blow a smoking  
coal

Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame  
Are full of glory, and heart uplifting pride,  
And not like this; the wars they love  
awaken

Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.  
Who did it then? Are you afraid; speak out,  
For I have put you under my protection  
And will reward you well. Dubthach the  
Chafer.

He had an old grudge. No, for he is with  
Maeve.

Laegaire did it. Why do you not speak?  
What is this house? [*A pause.*] Now I  
remember all.

*Fintain.* He will kill us. O, I am afraid!

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Cuchullain.* [*Who is before CONCOBAR'S chair.*] 'Twas you who did it, you who sat up there

With that old branch of silver, like a magpie

Nursing a stolen spoon. Magpie, magpie, A maggot that is eating up the earth!

[*Begins hacking at the chair with his sword.*]

No, but a magpie, for he's flown away.

Where did he fly to?

*Fintain.* He is outside the door.

*Cuchullain.* Outside the door?

*Fintain.* He is under Baile's yew-tree.

*Cuchullain.* Conco-bar, Conco-bar, the sword into your heart. ] \*

[*He goes out. A pause. The fool goes to the great door at back and looks out after him.*]

*Barach.* He is going up to King Conco-bar; they are all under the tree. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break and he is looking at it. Ah!

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. [*A pause.*] Well struck, well struck!

*Fintain.* What is he doing now?

*Barach.* Oh! he is fighting the waves.

*Fintain.* He sees King Concoabar's crown on every one of them.

*Barach.* There, he has struck at a big one. He has struck the crown off it, he has made the foam fly. There again another big one. [*Shouting without.*]

*Fintain.* Where are the Kings? What are the Kings doing?

*Barach.* They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses, they are all running.

*Fintain.* You say they are running out of the houses, there will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, fool.

*Barach.* There, he is down! He is up again! He is going out into the deep water.



ON BAILE'S STRAND.

*Fintain.* Come here, fool; come here, I say.

*Barach.* [*Coming towards him but looking backward towards the door.*] What is it?

*Fintain.* There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way, come quickly; the ovens will be full; we will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]



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